

INTRODUCTION OF THE HEALTH CARE COSTS ACT OF 2005

HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 28, 2005

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to introduce the Health Care COBRA OffSet Tax Savings (COSTS) Act of 2005. This important legislation is a step forward in helping working families afford quality health care in this country.

Rewarding work is one of the most fundamental core values of our Nation. Our founding fathers built a society on the notion that if you work hard, you will have an opportunity to provide a better future for your children and thus build a stronger, more competitive Nation. And, as we've seen throughout our Nation's history, America's workers have not disappointed.

Unfortunately, however, too many Americans today are working hard every day, but are still unable to make ends meet and provide even the most basic needs for their family, such as food, shelter, or health care. The legislation I'm introducing will help address one of these important challenges: affordable, quality health care for working families.

The statistics are undeniable—almost 46 million Americans have no health insurance and more than 1 million of the uninsured are in my home State of New Jersey. But that's just the beginning of the problem. Even families who are fortunate enough to have health insurance, are struggling to pay the premiums, which in New Jersey, have increased at four times the rate of earnings. Since 2000, the employee share of health care premiums in New Jersey increased almost 43 percent, or almost \$400 a year. When family earnings increase by only 10 percent over the same period, it becomes harder and harder to afford health care for your family.

The Health Care COSTS Act does not address the entire problem, but it will help some workers afford to keep their health insurance when they're between jobs. Currently, many workers who receive health coverage through their employer are entitled to keep that coverage for up to 18 months after they leave their jobs. This coverage is known as COBRA coverage. However, many don't take advantage of COBRA coverage because it's simply too expensive. The employee, who has just lost their job, has to pay the full cost of the coverage, making it prohibitively expensive for most families.

The Health Care COSTS Act helps moderate-income families with the cost of COBRA by providing an "advanceable" tax credit for half the cost of these health care premiums. The tax credit would go directly to the health plan administrator, thus reducing the workers' monthly premiums by 50%. This is not a hand-out, but a helping hand for workers who have contributed to the economic well-being of their community and have earned the opportunity to care for their family while they get back on their feet and find another job.

Clearly, there is much more to do in addressing the health care crisis in this country, but this is an important first step in helping working families afford health care coverage during one of the most difficult and vulnerable times a family might face. I hope this legisla-

tion will be a starting point for discussion of the significant challenges families face in affording quality health care in this country.

TRIBUTE TO ROSA PARKS

SPEECH OF

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of one of the most important figures in our Nation's history: Mrs. Rosa Parks. In 1955, this courageous and gallant young lady took a stand. Or more correctly, took a seat, on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her refusal to give up her seat to a white man may have resulted in a disorderly conduct conviction and a \$14 fine. But her refusal to move to the back of the bus ignited a flame that started a revolution. She brought forth change among the American people. The consequences and significance of her stand makes her a true hero in American history.

We always hear how Mrs. Parks refused to give up her seat because she was tired from a long day of work, but this is only a half truth. Yes, she was tired. But Rosa Parks' weariness came not only from a hard day's work, but also from years of discrimination that she and our people faced daily due to the racist and segregationist laws of our country. She knew that blacks were required to give their seats to white passengers if there were no more empty seats. But Rosa Parks made a conscious decision to fight. All of us here today, white, brown, black and blue, are better off today because Rosa Parks said, "No."

Rosa Parks' arrest served as a catalyst for a massive 381 day boycott of the public buses in Montgomery, which was led by another great individual, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During this time, African Americans would car-pool, walk, bike, taxi, or do whatever else they had to do to get to their various destinations. They did everything, but ride the bus. Despite the harassment that everyone involved in the civil rights movement faced, the boycott continued and was successful. Resolution was finally achieved in 1956 when the case was brought to court, and the segregation of buses was ruled unconstitutional. As we all know, what Rosa Parks jump started in 1955, eventually led to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

During her lifetime, Mrs. Parks worked for the equality of not just black people, but all people. She was elected secretary of the Montgomery branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, unsuccessfully attempted to vote many times to prove her point of discrimination, and founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development, an organization which aids in the social and educational development of our youth.

Rosa Parks demonstrated that one person can help so many other people by standing up for what they believe in. While we grieve her death, we also celebrate her life. We must remember her actions inspired others to dream more, learn more, and do more. With that, we all become more. A great man once said, "All of the great leaders have had one char-

acteristic in common; it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership." Great leaders of the time, such as Rosa Parks, were tired of the inequality, and tired of the disparity that African Americans were facing at that time.

She challenged; she led; she served; and she inspired. Rosa Parks died with honor and principle. We have, but no other option, to live our lives in a manner which honors and mirrors the virtues she pursued with absolute courage and bravery.

HONORING REBECCA K. BLOOD ON HER DISTINGUISHED CAREER

HON. RICK BOUCHER

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 28, 2005

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to honor Rebecca K. Blood on the occasion of her retirement from the American Public Power Association (APPA) after 13 years of work to advance policies of great importance to our Nation's economy and consumers. Throughout her service on behalf of consumer-owned utilities across the country, Ms. Blood has been a highly effective advocate of Federal policies that promote the development of renewable energy sources.

Ms. Blood has many important successes to point to in her distinguished career, including the establishment of the Federal Renewable Energy Production Incentive (REPI) program in the Energy Policy Act of 1992, which was enacted due in large part to her tenacious leadership.

This provision of the Act encouraged significant new development of renewable energy programs in public power communities throughout the country. As well, she has been an important voice for sound Federal licensing processes for our country's hydroelectric facilities, with the goal of ensuring rigorous environmental review within a workable and timely agency process. Ms. Blood has also been intricately involved in clean air issues throughout her career—and is exceedingly knowledgeable of the policy issues related to air emissions and climate change. In all of these areas, she has shown a great ability to develop strong and successful coalitions on behalf of key consumer and environmental interests.

A native daughter of the great State of Michigan, Ms. Blood came to Washington, DC as a graduate of Michigan State University. In the 80's, she served on the staff of Michigan Senator Carl Levin and Congressman Phil Sharp of Indiana. She also worked tirelessly for the two-term Governor Richard Celeste of Ohio, during the development of the Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1990, before going on to make a career in the electricity industry. Throughout her remarkable career, Ms. Blood has always made a point to mentor others, who have greatly benefited from her experience and insights.

Ms. Blood is well known in this town for her integrity, forthrightness, good humor, and unwavering commitment to the many public power communities across the country that she has so ably represented over the past 13 years. I join her many dear friends and colleagues here in Washington, DC in expressing